E 112
.J76

Monument to Christopher Columbus - His Portrait.

By

M. Jomard.

(From the Bulletin de La Sociètè de Geographie. Troisieme Serie. Tome III. 1845.)

The project initiated at Genoa to erect a monument to Christopher Columbus(1) calls, once more, the attention upon everything concerning that great man; and particularly upon a point which, thus far, has not been positively settled. Is there a faithful representation, an authentic portrait of Christopher Columbus? The persons in

---

(1) There is an ancient report of the debates of the Commune of Savona, in the XVII century, relating to the project of erecting a monument to Columbus. We don't know what were the results. There are, at Savona, some inscriptions in his honor. See in the Bulletin, for March 1845, a letter from General de La Marmora.

charge of the future monument at Genoa, have naturally studied that question very carefully. It would be most gratifying to be able to add to the grandeur, to the beauty of a learned composition worthy of modern genius if, instead of an ideal effigy, an exact resemblance of the great navigator could be obtained: In this short notice, we have no other aim than to present another element in that particular question, leaving aside all the others, even those relating to the birth place of the hero, a worn out and idle subject, though still discussed at the present time. It matters little to the glory of Liguria, the country which, undoubtedly, was his cradle, whether he was born within the walls of Genoa, at Quinto, at Savona, at Cogoleto or at Nervi? It is the same as to the trade of his father, since it is certain that Columbus pursued his studies at Pavia, where he

acquired his knowledge of navigation, cosmography, geometry and astronomy.

We will first give an idea of the appeal made recently to the Genoese, by the Commission of the monument to Columbus. That Commission issued its address on the 20th of January last; it is composed of persons selected from among the subscribers, and is as follows: Messrs. L. Durazzo, President, Lorenzo N. Pareto, Vincenzo Ricci, Secretary, Giacinto Viviani, Luigi Bartolomeo Migone, Treasurer, Pietro Elena, to whom were added the Marquis Gian-Carlo di Negro, Major General de la Marmora, the Marquis Leone Doria Lamba, Ludovico Casanova, lawyer, the Chevalier Giovanni Colla and Balduino Sebastiano.

Here is an extract of the address:

"Fellow Citizens: An old national wish is on the eve of being realized; Christopher

Columbus shall have a monument worthy of his fame and of his country. The King, desirous that the City of Genoa should do homage to the great navigator, has granted the petition of several citizens, who had joined together to fulfil a universal wish, and his Majesty has selected from among the subscribers, a Commission charged with collecting the necessary funds, and bring the enterprise to a satisfactory conclusion. Moreover, his Majesty has appropriated fifty thousand liras from the Royal Treasury. No Genoese heart will remain insensible to this appeal, the object of which is to do honor to the country, and to materialize the thought of all. Next year, the eighth congress of Italian Savants will meet here; what better opportunity to inaugurate, in presence of all Italy, the effigy of our great compatriot? In many other places statues of the most celebrated

Italians have been erected, but what man who, by the vastness of the undertaking, by unconquerable persistence in the execution of a project conceived for the progress of civilization, by an influence exercised upon the destinies of the world, can surpass or compare with the discovery of the new hemisphere? A public subscription is opened for that object. The smallest contributions shall be accepted, since the purpose in view is a national monument and no one must be deprived of the right, nor be exempt from the duty to co-operate to the work. Rich and poor, high and low in social ranks, merchants, workmen, Genoese navigators who, by their intelligence and their courage remind to the world, even now, that their ancestors, in days of yore, owned the empire of the seas, our compatriots who are far away from Genoa, but whose hearts still cherish the fond recollections of the blue skies

of the mother country; in a word, the whole nation will rise to honor the memory of the illustrious man born of the people, poor during his life, victim of relentless persecutions and condemned to captivity, but whose name after three centuries, shines and will continue to shine above that of every one, to the remotest posterity . . . . . As soon as the amount required can be properly ascertained, the Commission shall submit its views upon the kind, and site of the monument; it will entrust the work to the ablest artists, and make a report to the public, together with the names of the subscribers and the sums contributed by them."

Were the appeal to be made to every nation, to every admirer of Columbus in both hemispheres, there is no doubt that the subscription would soon be filled, even for the largest amount ever applied to a monument of that nature. It is no less

certain, that every eminent artist throughout Europe, would deem it an honor to be invited to compete for it. We must not, even by expressing a wish, anticipate the resolutions of the Genoese Commission or of the Sardinian Government; but whatever may be the decision, it is not out of place to ascertain, in the interest of sculptors to whom the monument shall be entrusted, if there is a faithful portrait of the Ammiraglio.

Many likenesses have been painted, drawn, engraved and published. We have seen, and heard of more than twenty; but doubtless, there are a great number unknown to us, which may be kept in private collections. What matters that quantity of images, if the most part of them bears not the seal of authenticity? I don't allude to the works of modern painters who, selecting the discovery of America for a subject, gave to Columbus, the

features most in accordance with their composition. The first condition for the artists was to be well impressed with the written portrait, by Don Fernando one of the sons of Columbus. I can do no better than to quote that description here, which is the most authentic upon the subject(1).

Columbus had a wide forehead, a long face, the nose aquiline; light eyes; when young his hair was blond, his height above the medium size, his expression lively, and his features noble and grave;(1) such are the characteristics which ought to be found in his likeness.

---

(1)There is nothing similar from his brother Diego Columbus, who succeeded the Admiral to his titles and honors as Vice Roy of the Indies.

(1)See "Life of Christopher Columbus," by D. Ferdinand Columbus, who founded the rich library at Seville, called La Colombina, or the Columbian. Translated from the Spanish into Italian, by Alf. Ulloa, Milan, 1614; in - 12.

The oldest engraved portrait is, I believe, the one published in the "Grands et petits Voyages"(2) though the oldest, is it for that reason more authentic and more faithful? I do not think so. It is well known, that most of the subjects of that great collection of scenes and figures, are mere fancies; for at that time people were not so very exacting as to the local color. And yet that portrait seems to me the model of many copies, even of valuable and carefully made paintings. There is a rather old one in the Versailles Museum, which was secured by the Count de Montesquion but its origin is unknown. In my opinion, it is evident by a copy of the engraving published by Th. de Bry, in 1593; it has the same head-dress, the same costume and the same face. That painting, in its turn, seemed as a model to the magnificent engraving by Mercuri, published last year. Let Columbus

---

(2) "Grands Voyages" Part V. p. 1.

be born either at Genoa[3] or Savona, Cogleto or Cuccaro, Abbisola or Nervi, who will believe that such a flemish looking face could have been his? That round countenance, that extraordinary flat nose, that silly air, and those semi-circular eyebrows, never could have belonged to the Ligurian race. Is that the expression of Columbus, the grave dreamer, the thoughtful and inspired man? Can any one find in those vulgar features (except the size of the eyes), in that full and almost jovial face, any sign of genius or even of shrewdness? Finally, is the costume more in accordance with the fashion of the time? We must add that the portrait seems to be that of a man of about forty years old, at which age Columbus was almost

---

[3] It is known that Th. de Bry pretends to have received that portrait from a friend, who got it from the painter commissioned, as he says, by Ferdinand and Isabella, to make the likeness of Columbus. (Great Voyages, part V. p. 1.) De Bry gave a portrait from an unknown origin: it is the one reproduced in a Medallion, at Parma. (Bibliotheca sive thesaurus virtutis et gloriae, Francfort, 1618.

unknown. It is to be presumed that Columbus must have worn a beard; in this likeness the whole face and chin are completely shaved. It may perhaps be argued that the chains, symbol of his captivity, and the new continent, engraved around the portrait, are sufficient evidence; but these accessories are merely ornaments; there is nothing of the kind in the painting and it is proper to call the attention to that fact.

3. There is also at Versailles another portrait with the same emblems, but as it is not placed on exhibition, I had to apply to Mr. de Cailleux, Director General of Museums, who gave me every facility to examine it. The Director General purchased it at the sale of a Mr. Magnan, it is a small painting on panel, 12 x 14 centimetres. There is an anchor on the frame, and on the right hand side of the figure an inscription of eight lines, in old Dutch, which reads as follows

"Cristoff de Colomb groots admiral vost zee on der Fernand, etc." That is:- "Christopher Columbus, Grand Admiral of the eastern seas, under Ferdinand, King of Castille, first inventor of the New World. It has no date, nor the painter's name; but the work is pretty fair, and belongs, no doubt, to the Flemish school. The forehead is completely bald, and shows an age that Columbus has not reached. The head lacks character, without nobleness, and is altogether vulgar. The whole costume of the individual consists of a kind of a great coat or vitchoura. If to that fancy head the above inscription has been afterward added, it must be acknowledged that it is a very old one, not only on account of the style of the letters and of the orthography, but for the title given to Columbus: "Admiral of the Eastern Seas." I therefore, believe that this likeness is older than the one first

mentioned, but the emblem has no other foundation than the inscription above quoted. The peculiarity of the costume, the common expression and perhaps, also, the age of the figure, remain to be discussed, but they do not justify an indentification with Christopher Columbus; and, if the artist intended to represent the Admiral, it must be confessed that he simply made an imaginary head.

4. Here is a painting much more important, for it is the work of Parmegiano: an excellent one, no doubt, but not more authentic on that account. It is in the Museo Borbonico, at Naples.(1) Columbus is seated near a window, on the wall are grouped a mace, and a helmet with a kind of wide twisted cord. The dress is black and very rich, on the head there is a red, notched cap, with a

---

(1)See Museo Borbonico,vol.3,pl.III Napoli, 1827.

feather and a button on which a vessel is seen passing through the pillars of Hercules; the coat is buttoned up on the chest, and opened at the sleeves. The left hand is bare, and the other gloved, holding a gold piece. The Admiral has a sword hanging by his side. The cap is raised up, and shows a very high forehead and even the hair; the face is very long, the beard also long and curly, the eyes are bright and look straight before them. The hero seems to be in deep meditation.

As the painting came from the Farnese Palace it is supposed that Cardinal Alexander may have asked of Parmegiano a portrait of Columbus, and tha the artist, for want of the model himself, or of an original likeness, had made a fancy one. It is true, as Mr. Guflielmo Bechi aptly observes in his notice, that if nature had not created Columbus as he is represented in that fine painting, art

could not imagine anything better. The drawing, style and coloring are, indeed, worthy of Parmegiano. As to the persons who affirmed, that that picture was contemporary of the time, and made while Columbus was living, they forgot that the artist was but three years old when the navigator died. Besides the features differ from those of all the portraits known thus far.

5. Genoa owns a beautiful bust of Columbus, which forms a part of his monument; it has been published several times, among others in the translation of the work of Don Ferdinand de Navarrete, upon the travels and discoveries made by the Spaniards.(1) The face is modeled in the antique style; this time the sculptor has taken for guide the Italian type, but there is not the least resemblance between that head and that in the Versailles Museum or of Theo. de Bry. I don't

---

(1)See the Relations of the Voyages undertaken by Christopher Columbus,by Don Ferd. de Navarrete, 8° Paris,1828,translated into French by Messrs. de La Roquette and de Vernenil; Vol. II.

know from what model the sculptor made his work; it is a fine face, but in my opinion, another fancy one. There is also in Genoa in the ducal palace, a painting representing Christopher Columbus planting the cross in America, but no resemblance can be found in it.

6. In the hall of the Commune at Cogoleto, a place which pretends to be the cradle of Columbus, a portrait of the great navigator can also be seen. But, from what I have been told, it bears no mark of authenticity. According to Mr. Ismardi, the tradition makes it to be three centuries old. It bears the following words: "Christophorus Columbus novi orbis repertor."(2)

7. About twenty years ago England owned, and

---

(1)See "Sulla patria propiamente detta di Cristoforo Colombo disertazione di Felice Isnardi. Pinerlo, 1838.

probably still owns, a painting alleged to have been brought from Spain; it represents a group of figures in which Christopher Columbus is seen. They are life size, I believe, and only drawn to the bust. A copy of it was sent by Dr. Mojon to the Marquis Giovanni Carlo di Negro.

8. The Duke of Veragua (Don Pedro Colon) descendant of Christopher Columbus, gave another portrait still more unlike the preceding ones, from the costume, the age and the face. It was copied from a painting in the library of the King, at Madrid, and is claimed to be contemporary. The dress is that of monk, the head is bare and the face beardless. It appears that a man between thirty-five and forty years of age, at the most; but as Christopher Columbus was fifty-two years old when he returned from his first voyage, or at the

time of his departure from Palos, it could have been only then that his portrait could have been made, and when he was still quite unknown. Granting that the face is not without some character, and supposing also, that there is no anachronism, one will naturally ask, what positive evidence is there, save a vague tradition to prove the resemblance? and that question can be easily addressed, considering the complete difference between that portrait and all the others. It is true that before his enterprise, Columbus hospitably received in convents, wore sometimes, the robe of the order, the portrait establishes the fact, at the most, that the painter who made that figure, was aware of the circumstances and availed himself of it; or

perhaps owing to that very circumstance people accepted and gave, as the portrait of Columbus a pretty fair one of some unknown monk. This is merely a conjecture to which we attach no importance whatever; and, moreover, our purpose is not to oppose it to the arguments presented by the translators of the work of Mr. de Navarrete.(1)

10. There are few collections of engravings which don't contain one or several portraits of Columbus. Having been informed that there were several in the portrait gallery of the Palais Royal, I applied to Mr. Brenot, the King's librarian, who

---

(1) On the contrary, we thank them for having published that portrait, it is a favor added to the one of rendering into French the "Relations des Voyages de Christopher Colomb. There is also another engraving which seems to have been made about the end of the XVI century.

Another portrait is in the Arsenal at Carthagena, and according to the tradition it is also said to be contemporary to the latter, we must add a bust

gave me leave to look into all the portfolios; I only found the one of the "Grands et petits voyages" the one from the Duke of Veragua, and a recent one engraved in England taken from the first.

11. Mr. William Prescott, in his history of Ferdinand and Isabella, gave a portrait of Columbus less with the intention of presenting a faithful likeness than to conform with the custom adopted in historical publications. He simply selected the one painted by Parmegiano.

12. I am informed by Mr. Berthelot, author of a "Voyage to the Canary Islands", and of other works

---

placed in one of the rooms of the Department of the Navy, at Madrid.

justly admired, whom I requested to make some researches in Seville, concerning the portraits of Columbus, that there is a painting in the archives of the Indies, which is said to be his likeness, doubtless owing to the fact that it belongs to the Dukes of Veragua. But that figure is not contemporary, far from it, and besides that the inscription, giving the real name of the person represented, has been painted over(1), which however, does not prevent from distinguishing a few letters,

---

(1)Mr. Berthelot thinks that it is of the XVII century.

then below the right arm, which is extended, the history of the voyages of Columbus, has been written upon a shield. The face is too youthful for that of the great navigator, who could not have had his portrait taken at that time of his life, and it is a defect which I noticed in the preceding ones. Finally, none of the characteristic features as described by Ferdinand Columbus, can be traced in that figure. It seems certain that in this instance as in the others, it was found easier to take a portrait already made, and pass it as one of Columbus, than to compose a new one.

13-14. Recently, some newspapers have mentioned two other portraits alleged to be contemporary, said to have been found in Spain, one of which at Salamanca, and looked upon as a family portrait;

I simply refer to them as a memorandum.

15. General de La Marmora, called my attention to the existence of an ancient portrait brought from Seville, and purchased by the Marquis Costa. It is painted on panel, and belongs to the Spanish school. I believe it to be the same which is the historical gallery at Florence. The name of Christopher Columbus is inscribed upon it(1).

16. I now come to another portrait which seems to me so superior to all the others, that I kept it

---

(1) I omit, in order to be brief, various portraits in Spain and in Italy, also the figure given by Mr. Napione (Della patria di Cristoforo Colombo, 1805) and by Mr. F. Cancellieri (Notizie storiche e bibliografiche di Cristoforo Colombo di Cue cara nel Monferrato, Roma, 1809). It was kept by Mr. Gughilmo-Fedele Colombo de Cuccaro.

for the last, though, in my opinion, it may be the most ancient of all; and also probably the most faithful. That portrait, if not by Titia himself belongs at least, to his school, such is the verdict of experienced experts. The picture was lately received in the gallery at Vicenza and remained unknown until recently. I saw it by chance, though I was attracted by the aged appearance of the painting and by its beauty, but particularly, by the noble character of the whole figure. The nose is aquiline, the forehead wide and high; the hair and the eyes fair, the latter somewhat darkened by time, the oval is long, the look firm and gentle, the expression full of frankness, the beard pointed, like in a portrait of the epoch of Ferdinand the Catholic

of Charles the Fifth or of Philip the First; calmness and nobility are depicted upon his features as upon those of men of superior mind. The bust does not indicate a great height. Now let this description be compared with that given by Ferdinand Columbus. Drawing nearer to the painting what was my surprise, when I saw in gold letters of the style of the time, on the right angle, these two words: "Christoforus Columbus"!-- It will easily be believed that this small discovery was for me a great satisfaction, and I lost no time to collect every information apt to enlighten me upon its origin. Thanks to the kindness and favor of the noble, and learned Count Orti Manara, Podestat of Verona, I was soon in possession of everything

relating to that subject. It will easily be understood why such a treasure remained so long unknown. The family owning the portrait kept it carefully, the last member bequeathed it to the gallery of painting of his native city, and it was at his death that it became a part of the collection. By mere chance, perhaps, of want of time, or on account of its aged appearance, it passed by unnoticed.

The Admiral is represented bare headed, his right hand upon his heart as if to affirm the sincerity of his words, the gesture is in harmony with history, as well as with the frankness of his features, he wears a gold chain and the fluted collar such as was worn in Spain at the time, and

is seen upon the portraits of that epoch.

It is likely that either Titian or his pupils painted Columbus from life, for if they went to Spain, it must have been after the death of the navigator. But it is not probable, that one of them may have found at Madrid, at Seville or somewhere else, between 1530 and 1540, a portrait made ad vivum and copied it afterwards, with the talent which characterizes the school of Titian?(1)

---

(1)The painting appears to me in the style of Domenico Campagnola. I shall soon publish it from an excellent drawing which I owe to the kindness to the learned Count Orti Manara.

(2)Mr. de Cailleux has communicated to me another small portrait in the "Salle des Dessins" in the Louvre (No.286),with the name of Columbus, and painted in mono chrome (grisaille). The head is uncovered,and looks-like that of a man between forty and forty-five years old. This portrait which has nothing authentic about it,was made to form a set with three other small drawings representing Magellan,Vespucius and Cortez. There are

That the painting had been brought to Venice, then kept at Verona or Vincenza, seems very natural. I cannot help, however from considering it as almost contemporary, and, also, as the most in accord than all the others (except, perhaps, the preceding one which is unknown to me,) with the description given by Ferdinand Columbus, and almost as beautiful as the one in the Museum at Naples, though easier in the pose.

All these circumstances lead me to think, that without taking into consideration the imperfect and fanciful effigies offered at various times as the portraits of the great man, the distinguished persons in charge of the monument to be erected to his glory, and the artists, who may be called upon

---

also three or four very old engravings, leaving aside ones, which are imaginary; in one of them Columbus is represented as holding a small quad-

to execute it, will not neglect to study the portrait last referred to and at the same time, be inspired by the fine painting dedicated to Columbus by Parmegiano.

---

rant, bare headed, a chain around his neck, and wearing the robe of a Dominican monk. The following words surround the portrait: "Primus novarum terrarum detector."

WERT
BOOKBINDING
Grantville, Pa
May June 1988